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AUTHOR Stankiewioz, Witold
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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly outlines the aims and functions of national libraries, particularly in the preservation of old and rare material; the losses of Poland's National Library during World War II; the work of Poland's Center for the Protection of Old Books; the publication of a Polish national union catalog of old and rare items, including incunabula; the development of a microfilming program for old manuscripts, prints, periodicals, and music; and the establishment of the National Fund for the registration and preservation of books, manuscripts, and other items written by Poles or about Poland up until the end of the 19th century and located in Polish or foreign libraries. The development of the National Fund program and its activities from 1976 to 1980 are reviewed. (ESR)

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THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY IN PROTECTION OF OLD AND RARE BOOK COLLECTIONS IN POLAND, AND INFORMATION ABOUT IT

by

Witold Stankiewioz

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Prof. dr hab. Witold Stankiewioz

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National Libraries' Section

The role of the National Library in protection of old and rare book collections in Poland, and information about it

The aim and functions of national libraries are the problems of great interest, often discussed among librarians. It is due to the main role of a national library in a library system of a given country and due to the importance of a national library collection, which is a representation of culture and literary output of a nation, as well as due to the history of a national library which, as an institution, develops in close relations with the main political, social and cultural events of a state.

All these just mentioned factors make a national library not only a treasury of culture and national literature but also one of the most important scientific workshops in a state which help to scientific research work in the field of historical, linguistic, literary, cultural and social studies. A national library must have sufficient financial and material means in order to lead and create such workshop, and first of all must employ a highly qualified staff of library researchers.

These remarks especially concern such national libraries which acquired and have collections of old prints and manuscripts, musicals, graphics, plans and maps. Such collections need special treatment as far as their acquisitions, elaboration, storage and availability is concerned. It is obvious that the aims connected with these problems especially with the availability of old prints and manuscripts and information about them, may be fulfilled in contact

with other libraries in the country only, first of all with big university and academic libraries.

In 1966 Mr. Kenneth W. Humphreys wrote: "a national library being a central archive of all published literature in the state, almost inevitably can have a big and general collection of manuscripts. In fact, it can be the biggest center of manuscripts and archives in the country and therefore it will have to take the function of coordinator of all activities conerning manuscripts and archives.

That is what happened in Poland too. Our aims have been formulated by the need of saving old prints and manuscripts, those which escaped the fires of the Second World War.

The National Library sustained the most heavy losses of almost whole pre-war collection of manuscripts, musicals, maps and incunabula. Therefore we started to protect all those pieces which remained not damaged. At the same time the National Library took up an initiative on a big scale: in 1950 it took over the Center for Protection of Old Book. There was a need for its establishment before the war, its programme was created during the war. The consequences of war somehow forced us to start quick and organized action. The Center had a leading role towards all libraries in Poland, those with collections of old books. Its work concentrated on evidence of old prints within the country and of Polonica in foreign collections, and on studies of history of Polish book, and training of library staff. Incunabula, Polonica from XVIth to XVIIIth century, foreign prints of the same period were put under the evidence.

The effect of the 30 year work of the Center, which still exists attached to the National Library, is a union catalogue of old prints in Polish libraries. It registors about 800 thousand old and rare books in Poland, also from

Catholic Church and private collections. The most precious part of it - the union catalogue of incunabula, which registers 10 thousand volumes, was published by the National Library in 1970. The second volume is in preparation. It contains, among others, proveniences, the evidence of war losses/ about three thousand volumes/.

This is the way how Poland became one of not numerous countries which published this sort of catalogue.

It was a great care about rare books and manuscripts that started the idea of microfilming the most precious items. The idea was taken up and realized by the National Library. For over 30 years collections of manuscripts, old prints, periodicals and musicals have been microfilmed. The action was planned and embraced collections of the National Library, state libraries, universities, institutions, church, monastries. In this way one of the biggest collections of microfilms in Europe was established and it contains over 120 thousand items. One of the advantages of this collection is reconstruction of many sets of periodicals not available in any library in the country.

Out experience of the Center and the action of mirofilming the idea of creating a new body taking care of old books and manuscripts in a better organized way arose in Poland in the seventies.

The idea was called the National Fund and was started by three main libraries in Poland: the National Library, the Jagiellonian Library and the Ossolineum Library in Wroolaw. The notion of the National Fund converges in many ways with the notion of the national archival fund containing the archival material of the state.

To date we cannot find the equivalent of this notion/National Fund/ in other countries, although we can mention certain solutions with similar aims. In Spain a legal act from 1972, called "Defensa del Tesoro Documental y

Bibliografico" for protection of incunabula and prints from the XVth - XVIIIth century is based on all created union catalogues of these collections. One should also mention separate departments of old and rare books in libraries of many countries e.g.: the Lenin State Library in Moscow, Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, Bibliotheque Royale in Brussels, Baerische Staatsbibliotek in Munich, many English and American libraries.

I would like to stress a far reaching convergence between our concept and the one which is led in the National Library of Slovakia/Matica Slovenska in Martin/. The resolution of the Slovak National Council, from 1973, gave Matica Slovenska the right to register and preserve collections of all Slovak Ristoric Libraries and of all old prints stored in Slovakia.

Under the notion of National Fund we have in mind the basic collection of documents, created by Poles or conerning Poland, stored in Polish libraries and documentation concerning Polonica present in foreign libraries. Foreign prints, incunabula, prints from the XVIth up to XVIIIth century, being the main source for studies on history of philosophy, political and social doctrines, theology brought to Poland a long time ago, are also an integral part of the National Fund. The most characteristic example is Wilanowska Library Collection, which is kept in the National Library, with very precious works of classics of French literature of the XVIIth andXVIIIth centuries, together with a set of volumes of the Great French Encyclopedia and valuable Polish works, especially from the XVIIIth century.

The abovediscussed definition of National Fund serves for better acquisition and preservation of documents, the documentation becomes almost complete, information about it is more efficient and it becomes generally available. In this way the National Fund is consistent with the UAP programme, is somehow the Polish part of it.

The National Library is the loading center of conducting and coordination of works on the National Fund. These works are closely connected with those taken up 10 years ago and concerning state system of information SINTO and specialization of library collections based on field-branch criteria.

The National Fund, apart from collections, embraces their published catalogues, just like previously mentioned catalogues of incunabula, as well as unpublished e.g. union catalogue of old prints in Polish libraries.

The basic assumption of the National Fund is to create central evidence of its library collections. The evidence had been started before the war but it had been almost lost and the work on it is continued since the first years after the war. It registers old prints from all big public libraries, and manuscripts, in major part, of all libraries being the initiators of the National Fund and others which publish their own catalogues of manuscripts. The work on catalogues of cartographic and microfilm collections have been started too.

Central evidence is closely connected with the problem of its completeness and selection of documents. Duplication of information is unavoidable but the most important thing is to show collections and their content build up in the course of history, and to give all searchers better means of using materials of the National Fund are under selection.

It is worth noting now that the problem of putting into the notion of old book the XIXth century book becomes more and more important. To date the XIXth century book has been regarded a new print, however quick and advanced process of its damage/due to many users/and reduced number of copies speak for necessity of taking the XIXth century book under special care, because it becomes an important document of a world culture. There is an increased interest in humanistic studies of the XIXth century - its literature, science

and art. The subjects discussed at international scientific congresses and meeting speak for this trend too.

The promoters of the National Fund based it on a close cooperation of all libraries, which have old documents and prints/manuscripts, ioonography, cartography, musicals, audiovisual materials/. It should also be stressed that the programme was taken up by inititiative and not order of the state authorities. The idea of National Fund comes out of the needs and aspirations of Polish librarians. Their cooperation concerus elaboration of collections, preservation and availability. The intention is to integrate libraries, taking part in Fund, functionally in order to improve circulation of information and unify methods of elaboration and availability. The works of the National Fund are financed out of library funds of participating libraries.

The idea of Fund has been widely propagated through mass media among all people and especially among scientific researchers.

What are the actual results of the programme?
Till the moment of starting the programme, for 4 years modernization of regulations concerning elaboration of manuscripts has been accomplished, works on guide of manuscript collections in Poland are coming to the end, the workers taking care of elaboration of old prints and carcgraphy are better trained. Several files of facsimiles of the XVIth-XVIIIth century maps, preserved in Polish libraries in a single, or double copy only, have been edited; exhibitions of the most precious parts of collections, of the three most important libraries taking part in Fund, have been organized.

These may not seem to be big results on a large scale, however they are important in everyday library work. At the same time better state of preserved collection and their availability to quite a big number of readers and researchers can be noticed without any doubt.

The National Library being the main coordinator of works on Fund, aims at complete preservation, elaboration and availability of old collections, especially of their most precious part which is represented by old prints and manuscripts.